

## THE BOOK OF REVELATION

JROC – Thinking Through the Bible...to Revelation: The Kingdom of God & Heaven  
8/27/17

What do you believe about heaven? What does heaven look like?  
What's your Scriptural support?

Lucas Cooper's sermon, *All Things New*, 7/16/17  
Randy Alcorn's book *Heaven*

Alcorn writes that God promises we who are believers in Jesus: a resurrected life in a resurrected body, with the resurrected Christ on a re-created earth!

The Barna Research Group has reported: "An overwhelming majority of Americans continue to believe that there is life after death, and that heaven and hell exist." But, belief in heaven and hell varies greatly. Barna continues, "They're cutting and pasting religious views from a variety of different sources – television, movies, conversations with their friends." And so we have a highly subjective theology (what we desire) of the afterlife disconnected from what the Bible teaches.

Alcorn writes in his book, *Heaven*, "I attended a fine Bible college and seminary, but I learned very little about heaven. I don't recall a single classroom discussion about the New Earth. In my *Hebrews to Revelation* class, we never made it to Revelation 21-22"

Scripture presents heaven in several ways including a garden (Rev. 22:2; Eze. 36:33-36), a city (Rev. 21:10; Heb. 11:10, 16), and a kingdom ("Kingdom of heaven" same as "Kingdom of God" [Mark and Luke use "Kingdom of God," Matthew writes "Kingdom of heaven." Matthew was written to the Jewish people. Jewish people didn't flippantly use the name of God!]. A garden, a city, a kingdom.... Many believers make the mistake of assuming that these terms are merely analogies with no actual correspondence to the reality of heaven.

## CREATION FALL REDEMPTION RESTORATION.

Last week as we discussed the Kingdom of God, we saw that...

- God created a perfect, earthly, material kingdom. God is the good and perfect King.
- God gave man duties – to name the animals, to nurture and serve the earth (have dominion over the earth).
- Man sinned, he rebelled against God, and rejected God as the good and perfect King. Satan usurped man's dominion.
- God did not scrap His original plan. God chose to redeem and to restore mankind and the earth.
- The underlying principle of the Bible: God's character. God is faithful. What He has promised, He will deliver.

- Jesus, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (Rev. 13:8) has come to earth as 100% man and as 100% God (Immanuel – God with us – God in the flesh) Who came to DIE.
- Jesus had to be GOD IN THE FLESH. Man dies; man sheds blood. Jesus did so!
- As eternally God – Jesus’ blood is NOT tainted – it’s precious and can redeem man (I Pet. 1:19).
- AND, when Jesus returns at His Second Coming, HE will establish the Kingdom of God and restore the earth.
- NOTE: This is what Jesus offered to Israel – the Gospel that Jesus preached when He first came – “The Kingdom of heaven/God is at hand” – because the King was on earth.
- God is going to RESTORE His perfect design! We who are redeemed will live as resurrection beings on a recreated earth!

In the Gospels, “salvation” is mentioned 40 times, “sin” is mentioned 60 times, and “kingdom” is mentioned over 120 times!

At the end of the 1,000 years of Jesus’ earthly kingdom reign, the current heavens and earth will pass away and be replaced with the new heavens and the new earth. The eternal dwelling place of believers – in resurrected bodies will be the new earth – in the New Jerusalem. The New Jerusalem, which is also called the Tabernacle of God, the Holy City, the City of God, the Celestial City, the City Foursquare, and Heavenly Jerusalem, is literally heaven on earth. It is referred to in the Bible in several places (Galatians 4:26; Hebrews 11:10; 12:22–24; and 13:14), but it is most fully described in Revelation 21. We as believers in Jesus will reside in resurrected bodies on the new earth with pearly gates (1400 miles high) and golden streets.

John. 14:1-3 – *Let not your heart be troubled...in My Father’s house there are many mansions...I go to prepare a place for you.... And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.*

The concept that heaven is "in the clouds" is unbiblical. The concept that we will be "spirits floating around in heaven" is also unbiblical. The heaven that believers will experience will be a new earth, free from sin, evil, sickness, suffering, and death. It will be re-creation of our current earth, but without the curse of sin. What about the new heavens? In the ultimate recreation of the heavens and the earth, they meet!

May we all allow God's Word to shape our understanding of heaven.

Because Scripture makes it clear that Jesus is preparing a place for us, and God’s Kingdom will come to earth and the redeemed will reside in physical resurrection bodies in the New Jerusalem...there is no reason to spiritualize or allegorize all earthly descriptions of heaven. BUT - WHY do so many – even believers – have such an ethereal image of heaven? Ethereal - relating to the regions beyond the earth; celestial,

heavenly; unworldly, spiritual; lacking material substance; immaterial, intangible; suggesting the heavens or heaven. (Merriam/Webster Dictionary)

Spiritualizing not only these passages re: heaven but other passages in Scripture as well has its origin in Platonic thought – teachings of the Greek Philosopher, Plato! Plato believed and taught that materials things, including the human body and the earth, are evil, while immaterial things such as the soul and heaven are good. This is called Platonism.

The early church was influenced by Platonism through the teachings of Philo (ca 20 BC to 50 AD) and Origen (185-254 AD) among others. They taught that human spirits are better off without bodies and that heaven is a disembodied state. They rejected heaven as a physical realm. They spiritualized the biblical teaching of resurrected people inhabiting a restored/re-created earth!

Thomas Aquinas (13<sup>th</sup> C) embraced a heaven that is intangible, immaterial and...more “spiritual”.

The higher road is “spiritual” in the teaching of Origen and other Church Fathers.

A Christian man told Alcorn, “This idea of having bodies and eating food and being in an earthly place...it just sounds so unspiritual”!

Matt. 8:11 – sitting down w/ Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven – sharing a meal.

Matt. 27:51-53 - *Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split,<sup>52</sup> and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised;<sup>53</sup> and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.*

What would those believers who espouse this Platonic teaching (Alcorn has labeled this teaching among Christians as *Christoplatonism*) do with...

- Jesus’ incarnation – coming to earth in the flesh – being born – taking on a body? (Isa. 7:14; Isa. 9:6) The Incarnation wasn’t God talking as if he’d become a man – it was God actually becoming a man

- Jesus’ bodily resurrection – Luke 24:39 - *Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have.* (flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God – I Cor. 15:50)

- Job 19:25-26 - *For I know that my Redeemer lives, And He shall stand at last on the earth;<sup>26</sup> And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God,*

- I John 1:1-4 - *That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—<sup>2</sup> the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—<sup>3</sup> that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.<sup>4</sup> And these things we write to you that your joy may be full.*

- I John 4:3 - *and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God.*
- Jesus setting up His kingdom on earth (Rev. 19:14-Rev. 20)
- Rev. 21 & 22.
  - Spiritual/allegorical interpretation: The river going through the New Jerusalem is God's grace; the tree becomes Christ, the city walls become security. OR the river becomes Christ, the tree God's grace, and the city walls God's omnipotence. ETC.
  - Leon Morris wrote, "When John speaks of streets paved with gold, of a city whose gates are made of single pearls and the like, we must not understand that the heavenly city will be as material as present earthly cities."

An interpretive approach that makes everything symbolic also makes everything subjective – dependent upon our agenda, opinion, logic! This approach will never allow us to break free of our assumptions and see what the Bible really says about God's creation, the fall of man, His grand plan of redemption and restoration!

To those espousing Platonic thought – it smacks of Gnosticism which Scripture comes against – John 1:1, 14; I John 1:1-4; I John 4:3.

Let's consider the Biblical facts that give us a very positive view of the physical realm:

- God created Adam and Eve to be spiritual and physical. They were not human until they were both. Gen. 2:7 - *And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.*
- God often took on human form in OT times (angel visiting Abraham [Gen. 18]; man wrestling with Joshua [Josh. 5:13-15]; Jacob wrestling with God [Gen. 32:22-32]). He was also likely in human form (theophany – pre-Incarnate appearance of Jesus) as He walked in Eden.
- God took on a human body, becoming a man, not just temporarily but forever (Stephen saw Jesus standing at the right hand of God [Acts 7:55-56]; Jesus will return to earth on a horse [Rev. 19:14ff]; His garments will be bloodied when He fights in Bozrah at Armageddon [Isa. 63:1ff]; His feet will touch the Mount of Olives at His Second Coming [Zech. 14:4])
- God raised Jesus in a human body with physical properties, a body that walked, talked, ate, and could be touched. He explicitly stated that He was not a spirit (Luke 24:39).
- God created humanity as His crowning achievement.
- God the Holy Spirit indwell believers. I Cor. 6:19-20 - *Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? <sup>20</sup> For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.*
- God will raise people with eternal physical/spiritual bodies then come down to inhabit the New Earth with them!